

Rally Petitioners Trade Fisticuffs

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Amid fistfights with opposition leaders outside the mayor's office Monday, pro-Kremlin activists won permission to hold mass rallies on all major Moscow squares on the day of the presidential election and the day after.

Opposition activists were effectively shut out from prime protest spots on those two days. They accused their rivals of cutting in front of them in the waiting line.

Police detained three opposition activists involved in a scuffle outside 13 Tverskaya Ulitsa.

"Activists of youth groups such as Nashi and Young Russia reserved a place in line earlier," an Interior Ministry source told Interfax. "Representatives of the opposition didn't react to police demands to stop illegal actions and put up resistance."

Left Front leader Sergei Udaltsov, who was among the opposition activists at the mayor's office, criticized the chain of events that led to the rejection of opposition petitioners.

Udaltsov said Maxim Mishchenko, a Public Chamber member and organizer of the pro-Kremlin rallies, showed reporters that his request for a March 5 rally on Lubyanskaya Ploshchad had been registered at 8:41 a.m.

Udaltsov also said the door to the mayor's office was closed, preventing the opposition supporters from entering.

"It is clear that this is an absolutely illegal, fraudulent and circuitous use of an administrative channel," Udaltsov told Interfax.

But Mikhail Dukhovich, a spokesman for organizers of the pro-Kremlin rallies, told The Moscow Times that the window for rally petitions was open from 8 a.m. onward and that Mishchenko used a neighboring door to enter the mayor's office.

Duma Deputy Ilya Ponomaryov, of A Just Russia, was blocking the window when Mishchenko approached, but Ponomaryov did not have a written rally application, Dukhovich said.

Ponomaryov [said](#) in a YouTube video that he had managed to get to the window through another door and that he saw Mishchenko and about 15 young men with short hair approaching.

"It was clear that they had been let in by the mayor's office officials through a back entrance," Ponomaryov said.

Mishchenko's supporters dragged Ponomaryov away from the window as police watched sneering, Ponomaryov said.

Two nearby riot police officers then grabbed Ponomaryov and threatened him with a beating, he said.

Another riot police officer attacked opposition activist Nadezhda Mityushkina and tried to rip up her passport when she approached the window, but Ponomaryov prevented him from doing that, he said.

Udaltsov said about 20 activists of the League of Voters arrived at the mayor's office about 8 p.m. Sunday to be the first to submit a request for a March 5 rally.

But about 11 p.m., two buses filled with pro-Kremlin youths arrived and said they had been in line since 5 p.m.

Dukhovich disputed that timeline. He said the pro-Kremlin youths arrived at 4 p.m. Sunday and opposition activists arrived at midnight.

Veronika Marfina, spokeswoman for the League of Voters, told Interfax later that there were no activists of the league outside the mayor's office Monday.

The league's supporters have not yet decided on staging a rally over the presidential and the Dec. 4 parliamentary votes, but they might join the opposition forces, Marfina said.

Solidarity spokeswoman Olga Shorina told The Moscow Times that besides Udaltsov

the petitioners for an opposition rally included Sergei Parkhomenko of the League of Voters and Public Chamber member Yelena Lukyanova.

The discrepancy between Marfina's and Shorina's comments could not be immediately reconciled. Repeated calls to Marfina's cell phone went unanswered.

Udaltsov said one opposition activist and one pro-Kremlin activist were detained in the scuffle, contradicting police accounts.

Opposition activists submitted a request for a rally on Lubyanskaya Ploshchad on March 5 anyway, Udaltsov said.

Pro-Kremlin youth groups will hold rallies in downtown Moscow starting at 3 p.m. on March 4, which is election day, and starting 7 a.m. the next day, a representative of the Headquarters for Unified Actions told Interfax.

The rallies will be held on Manezh Square, Ploshchad Revolyutsii, Teatralnaya Ploshchad, Lubyanskaya Ploshchad and Bolotnaya Ploshchad.

The pro-Kremlin youth rallies will be aimed at "discussing the preliminary results of the vote" and "supporting volunteer movements and civil initiatives," a press statement on Young Russia's website [said](#).

Pro-Kremlin youths founded the Headquarters for Unified Actions in late January, in the wake of the mass protests after the Dec. 4 State Duma vote, won by Putin's United Russia party.

The pro-Kremlin group adopted a white glove as its symbol in answer to the white ribbon that has become the symbol of the opposition protesters.

On Thursday's Defenders of the Fatherland holiday, Putin supporters expect up to 40,000 participants for a march and rally at Luzhniki Stadium, where Putin may speak.

On Sunday, opposition groups will gather for a [silent human chain](#) around the Garden Ring and then a rally called "[Farewell to Putin's Political Winter](#)."

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